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"THIN RED LINE"

Did not disfranchise any person, but was used to cross out names on lists where the electoral subdivisions overlapped, otherwise the voter would be on two lists.

What is known as the "Thin Red Line" has been exploited by the Conservatives from one end of the country to the other. It is alleged that in the general elections of 1904, the Voters' lists in Manitoba were tampered with by drawing a red line through the names of upward of 10,000 voters. The purpose being to disfranchise Conservative voters.

This charge has not an atom of truth upon which to rest. That the lists furnished in 1904 by the King's Printer, and sent by him to the Clerk of the Court in Chancery, were corrected by the returning officers in charge of the elections is absolutely true. That the lists were inapplicable to the Dominion Elections is also true, and that there was a necessity to revise the lists and make them conform to the electoral divisions to which they applied, is beyond question.

CONSERVATIVES AT FAULT

TO-DAY THERE IS NOT A LEGAL VOTING LIST IN THE PROVINCE OF MANITOBA FOR DOMINION PURPOSES. The object is to retain the lists which were made for purposes of provincial elections years ago, and which to-day are stuffed with names of men long since strangers to the district, and upon which the names of men who are entitled to vote do not appear.

The most serious defect, however, is the one explained below, caused by the Geographical differences between the Provincial and Dominion electoral divisions. The Provincial list may, with the exceptions noted, be applicable to a Provincial election, but in the case of a Dominion election, one constituency is found to consist of portions of four to ten Provincial electoral divisions. Therefore, it becomes the duty of the returning officer to retain on the list only such portions of the overlapping electoral division as pertain to the Dominion constituency.

There is a provision in the Election Act to cover this, the effect of which is, that the list must be corrected. It can be done in two ways; Re-write it, and leave off the names which do not properly belong to the district, or cross off the names. The latter method was adopted, and a line was drawn through the names with red ink. A very unpleasant duty for the officers, but none the less an imperative duty, and no political consideration entered into the matter at all.

The Conservative Government of Manitoba has for years prevented fair method of registration.

They have taken the control of the preparation of Voters' lists out of the hands of the Judges.

They have reduced the number of registration booths, and also the time in which a voter may register.

They have neglected to clear the lists of names which should have been removed years ago.

They have formulated such regulations that it is impossible for voters to get on the lists, in consequence of which thousands are disfranchised.

In the provincial elections in Manitoba, the returning officer divided the registration districts, made polling divisions and ADJUSTED THE LISTS to suit, AND DID IT BY DRAWING A BLACK LINE THROUGH THE NAMES.

AUTHORITY FOR USING LINE

The act of running a line through a name wrongfully on the Voters' list is not confined to the Liberals, neither is such a course unrecognized by the Manitoba Statutes. Sub-Section 6 of Section 65 of the Manitoba Elections Act, 1904, provides for such revision—the Section reads:—

“A line in black or red shall be drawn by the revising judge or barrister in the middle or through the name of any person struck off the list of electors or from the list of applications appearing in the registration register, but in such a manner that the name can be readily read and distinguished.”

Mr. Aylesworth, Minister of Justice, has introduced a bill which will in future prevent the conditions which have made the thin red line, or any line necessary. It aims at the creation of a voters' list which will contain the names of all persons entitled to vote in a given electoral division, without regard to politics, but having regard only to qualification.

FRAUDULENT VOTERS' LISTS

The case against the Manitoba lists is based upon certain facts which cannot be disputed. Six years subsequent to the passage of the Dominion Act, a list, made in the first place for use in the Provincial general elections, was erected into a permanent list by legislation, and it was designed to benefit the Conservatives and injure the Liberals. The Manitoba list is not a list compiled by Municipal Councils. **IT IS A LIST COMPILED BY OFFICIALS APPOINTED BY THE ROBLIN GOVERNMENT, WHO ARE, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, ACTIVE POLITICAL WORKERS, AND THEREFORE STRONG PARTISANS.**

The permanent list in Manitoba, in the methods by which it is revised annually, bears no resemblance whatever to the permanent lists of the Eastern provinces, which the Dominion Government had in mind when advocating their adoption for Dominion purposes. In Ontario the municipal assessor, as part of his duties, compiles annually a list for municipal and provincial purposes. This list is revised each year by the Council, and subsequently by a Judge. The provisions for revision are determined by Statute, and are identical year by year and cannot be varied. The result is that each year sees a real revision of the lists. There is a practical guarantee that no matter when an election is called, every person entitled to vote, will find his name on the list.

In the East a man owning property goes on the list as a matter of course, while a man entitled to vote by virtue of manhood suffrage has his name put on the list by the municipal assessor, whose duty it is to see it put on. **IN MANITOBA A MAN DOES NOT GET ON THE LIST IN ANY CASE, UNLESS HE PERSONALLY APPEARS AND REGISTERS, WHICH IS MADE PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE IN MANY DISTRICTS IN MANITOBA.**

LISTS FIVE YEARS OLD

The lists which are now in existence in Manitoba, outside of the cities of Winnipeg and Brandon, are based upon the lists made in May, 1903, and revised in June of the same year, five years ago. That is to say, that a name placed upon the list then, is still there, unless some individual or party organization has gone to the trouble and expense of having it removed.

The present Manitoba lists have been in existence for five years, only twice in that time did the lists make any approximation to completeness. After the initial registration in 1903, and after the registration and revision of 1906. On both these occasions the lists

were prepared with special view to an impending provincial election. **THE MANITOBA GOVERNMENT HAS DELIBERATELY REFUSED TO CLEAR THE LISTS OR SUPPLY PROPER FACILITIES FOR THE REGISTRATION OF VOTERS.**

VOTERS CANNOT REGISTER

In many parts of the province the registration districts cover large areas, making it a difficult, costly and practically impossible task to secure a complete registration of voters. To give some idea of the distances to be travelled by voters in order to get their names on the list, the following examples of ten constituencies out of forty, will prove interesting:—

Avon.....	40 miles	Gladstone.....	110 miles
Carillon.....	78 “	Kildonan.....	260 “
Dauphin.....	70 “	St. Andrews.....	260 “
Emerson.....	164 “	Springfield.....	105 “
Gimli.....	210 “	Swan River.....	145 “

RESTRICTION OF REGISTRATION OPPORTUNITIES

In 1903, when registration was under the control of the Judges, there were 387 registration places, and 2,332 days allowed for registering. Now there are 396 registration places, and 396 days allowed for registration.

The following table shows how the various changes were made:—

	Registration Places.	Open Days.	Total Days.
Year 1903.....	387	6	2,322
“ 1904.....	386	1	386
“ 1905.....	37	1	37
“ 1906.....	454	2	908
“ 1907.....	233	1	233
“ 1908.....	396	1	396

In 1903 there were 2,322 days allowed for registration, to-day there are only 396.

When registration affairs were in the hands of the Judges there was not much cause for complaint, now, everything is controlled by the Provincial Government. A board of Judges provided for, they select one or more of themselves to act as revising officers, or may choose barristers. Other than that, they have no power excepting to sit in Court and decide the cases that come before them during the time fixed by order in council. All the judges have power to do, is

to sit at the time and place as directed, they have no control of registration, the law respecting which is arbitrarily laid down by the Manitoba Conservative Government.

When the Conservatives arranged in 1905 that there should be only one registration booth for each constituency, a deliberate attempt was made to disfranchise the people, because it was not only unreasonable that men should be compelled to make a three-day journey to the place of registration, but when they arrived at the place, they had only a few hours in which to register, and many of them never reached their turn, and went home disappointed, disgusted, and disfranchised.

CONSERVATIVES DISFRANCHISED VOTERS

The Manitoba Conservative Government have purposely and systematically designed the registration law to prevent voters getting upon the list. It is alleged that there are in Winnipeg alone 4,000 to 5,000 voters available for registration, but in thirteen hours it is impossible for more than a few hundred to register, while there remains on these antiquated lists thousands of names that cannot be removed for lack of proper legal machinery. In case of a close election, it makes it possible for the Conservatives to send for the men whose names have been illegally kept on the list, although they may long since have changed their residence, and thus manipulate a fraudulent election.

POLLING DIVISIONS OVERLAP

The Provincial polling divisions and the Dominion polling divisions do not coincide, the one overlaps the other. The result is that a riding for Dominion purposes, may contain portions of ten different polling subdivisions established for provincial purposes, and the officials conducting Dominion elections have of necessity to expunge from the respective lists names of voters belonging to another poll. This was done by drawing through the name "The thin red line." It did not have the effect of disfranchising the voter, for his name still remained on the polling division to which he properly belonged.

EXAMPLES OF OVERLAPPING

The extraordinary manner in which provincial constituencies overlap and form part of the Dominion constituencies, may be found in the following examples:—

PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE

Parts only of:—

Beautiful Plains,

Gladstone,

Lakeside,

Cypress,

S. Brandon,

Norfolk,

Portage.

This is the only Dominion constituency in Manitoba which contains portions only of provincial subdivisions.

SELKIRK

The Dominion constituency of Selkirk is made up of the following provincial subdivisions.

The whole of	Kildonan and St. Andrews.
“	Springfield.
Parts of	La Verandrye.
“	Rockwood.
“	North Winnipeg.
“	St. Boniface.
“	Assiniboia.
“	Gimli.

MacDONALD

The Dominion constituency of MacDonald is unique in its way. It is composed of portions of no less than ten provincial subdivisions, as follows:—

Whole of	Dufferin.
Parts of	Morris.
“	Assiniboia.
“	Rockwood.
“	Gimli.
“	Lakeside.
“	Portage.
“	Cypress.
“	Manitou.
“	Mountain.

It is obvious that as the whole of the above subdivisions, with few exceptions, are not included in the Dominion constituencies, it follows that some names must be crossed out, and this was done with a thin red line.

NAMES IMPROPERLY ON LISTS

The following examples will show how improperly the lists were prepared, and the large number of names which appear on the lists owing entirely to the overlapping of the polling divisions.

ELECTORAL DISTRICT.	TOTAL NAMES ON NOT QUALIFI'D	
	LIST.	
Gladstone.....	53	15
"	42	21
Beautiful Plains.....	204	49
Norfolk.....	103	86
S. Brandon.....	184	110
"	66	63
Cypress.....	96	62
"	212	164
Portage la Prairie.....	173	80
Lakeside.....	268	156
"	90	89

Examples of total lists in three constituencies as supplied by the Clerk of the Court in Chancery to the returning officer:

ELECTORAL DISTRICT.	TOTAL NAMES ON NOT QUALIFI'D	
	LIST.	
Lisgar (total).....	7,344	3,097
Selkirk (total).....	8,388	3,165
Portage la Prairie (total).....	13,000	5,000

What applies to the few polling districts mentioned above, will apply all over the province. Having no separate list for Dominion purposes, where the polling districts overlapped, the lists of every overlapping division were included in the Dominion subdivision, and consequently the names had to be struck off, and a thin red line was used for that purpose.

The employment of this line in crossing off the names was in no sense a fraud, neither did it operate to disfranchise any person. If every man whose name was on the list had been allowed to vote, then a very serious fraud would have been permitted, for it must not be forgotten that when the name was crossed off because the polling division overlapped, the name remained on the list where it properly belonged. Had the name not been crossed off in the overlapping division, then the person would have been on two voting lists, and entitled to vote in two electoral divisions.

STRIKING NAMES OFF WAS NECESSARY AND PROPER

It has been clearly demonstrated that the only way to make a correct voters' list was to strike out those names that were improperly there. Mr. Knott, an attorney employed by the Manitoba Government to prosecute the deputy returning officers for using the thin red

line before the Parliamentary Committee in Ottawa, stated definitely that the returning officer, in case of an overlapping division, only performed his duty when crossing off the names with a thin red line.

The question was put to Mr. Knott by the Chairman of the Committee, Hon. Mr. Aylesworth, Minister of Justice, as to where the limits of the registration district described in the King's Printer list, do not coincide with the limits of the polling division described in the proclamation, what is the returning officer to do in preparing the list which he must send to each deputy returning officer?

"A. The only reasonable thing he could do, to my mind, is to similarly erase the names from the printer's list supplied to him by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery.

"Q. Acting on his own knowledge?"

"A. Acting on his own knowledge."

AYLESWORTH BILL REMEDIES DEFECTS

With the passing of the bill prepared by the Minister of Justice, the imperfect lists of the past will be impossible in the future, and consequently the unpleasant duty of correcting them by crossing off the names that should not be on, will be avoided, and the thin red line, for which the Conservative Government of Manitoba is largely responsible, will never be heard of again.
